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Resolution for the Faculty Senate, Oct. 7, 1997

When LSU added a GPA criterion to its admissions decisions for the class entering in 1990, and raised the nominal high school GPA requirement to 2.3 for the class entering in 1995, the stated intention was to strengthen our admissions standards again after a few years. We have now had the opportunity to see the effect of those improved standards. The data show that, as our students' high school grade point averages and standardized test scores increase, their success at LSU improves as well: Retention rates from one year to the next, graduation rates, and LSU grade point averages all correlate with high school GPA and test scores, and all are improving steadily.

At the same time as our students have gotten better, their number has increased as well. Not including those students admitted under the ACCESS program, the number of entering freshmen increased by approximately 600 students from fall 1996 to fall 1997. Based on the 14-day statistics, we had an entering freshman class this fall of 4324 students. We can be pleased that so many Louisiana students are choosing to come to LSU, and it is not unreasonable to assume that our upgraded admissions standards have played a role in making LSU an increasingly attractive place to come for an education. Nevertheless, we need to be concerned that we can provide the services and the facilities and the teaching that our students deserve. As the size of our undergraduate student body increases, there will be increasing demands on our teaching staff, our classroom and laboratory capacity, and our overall ability to provide first rate services to our students. The unexpectedly large number of students this fall caused problems in several departments that had to increase teaching staff and find new classroom space on short notice.

For fall 1998, the State Legislature has instituted the TOPS (Tuition Opportunity Program for Students) program which will provide free tuition for any new freshman entering LSU with a high school GPA of 2.5 or higher, 16.5 hours of core units, and an ACT score at least equal to the maximum of the previous year's state average or 19. Students with better entering credentials may qualify for additional awards. This innovative state program holds the promise that it may make the state's flagship university a good deal more attractive for our top Louisiana high school graduates, who might otherwise choose to attend out-of-state schools. It also holds the risk, however, that the number of qualified students coming to LSU next year may rise significantly, further stressing our already burdened capacity. It is difficult at this point to predict how serious a problem this may be next fall, but there is a clear need to be planning now for potential problems caused by another increase in enrollment.

Last spring, Chancellor Jenkins requested that the Faculty Senate look at the possibility of strengthening our admissions standards again. The Senate's Admissions, Standards, and Honors Committee has been meeting to study the issue, and will plan to have a detailed report to present to the Senate in November. Nevertheless, although ASH is not yet ready to present detailed or final recommendations, we note that the issues of enrollment management in particular provide some time urgency. If we intend to put any

substantive changes into effect for Fall 1998, we need to inform high school students and their counselors very soon. We therefore propose the following resolution to be discussed initially at the Senate meeting in October, and improved and finalized in November.

Resolution 97-01

Whereas LSU, Louisiana's flagship university, should strive to attract the state's best and most promising high school graduates, and provide them with the best training and finest quality education possible, and

Whereas our statistics show that higher admissions standards translate into better student performance and enhanced student success at LSU, and furthermore appear to be correlated with increased numbers of high school students considering LSU to be an attractive university to attend, and therefore with rising numbers of entering freshmen and rising year-to-year retention rates, and

Whereas Fall 1997 enrollments have already made it necessary to increase instructional staff and find additional classroom space on short notice, and

Whereas the State has instituted the innovative and exciting TOPS scholarship program, which may lead to further increases in the number of students wanting to attend LSU, and

Whereas LSU applauds the State Legislature's efforts to "raise the bar" for high school students across the state, and should play its part in this effort to raise academic standards as well,

Therefore be it resolved that the Admissions, Standards, and Honors Committee present to the Faculty Senate a plan to:

1. Continue the process of strengthening our admissions standards for entering students. Specifically, ASH will consider the advisability of:
 - a) Raising the guaranteed admissions requirements (high school GPA and ACT score), and
 - b) placing students who apply but do not qualify under a) into a secondary pool. The records of all such students would be reviewed on an individual basis. In these cases, the Undergraduate Admissions Committee would consider grade point average, standardized test scores, class rank, pattern and quality of courses, grade trends, educational objectives, extracurricular activities, leadership abilities, school recommendations, special talents, significant life and career experiences, or membership in groups underrepresented in the student body. Students from this tertiary pool would be admitted in parallel with applicants admitted under item a).

2. Implement as much as possible of a new admissions plan in time to manage the Fall 1998 enrollment rationally and sensibly, and in a manner that utilizes the University's resources efficiently in order to provide high quality services to both continuing and entering students. At the same time, any new plan should recognize the University's commitment to current high school seniors who have prepared in good faith for the current published admissions standards.